

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 129

KUWAIT PASS DOHA AND MUSCAT

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, IZ, US, UR

SUBJECT: ROWLAND EVANS VISIT TO IRAQ

1. SUMMARY: HIGH POINTS OF ROWLAND EVANS FEB 1-6 VISIT TO IRAQ WERE TWO HOUR INTERVIEW WITH RCC VICE CHAIRMAN SADDAM HUSSEIN AND HELICOPTER VISIT TO UMM QASR. HE ALSO MET WITH MEMBER OF REGIONAL LEADERSHIP ADNAN AL-HAMDANI AND MINISTER OF INFORMATION TARIQ AZIZ. INTERVIEWS SUGGESTED TENSION IN IRAQI-SOVIET RELATIONS, BUT THIS WAS OFFICIALLY DENIED. EVANS IS FIRST WESTERN JOURNALIST TO VISIT UM QASR AND HE DEPARTED CONVINCED THAT NO SOVIET BASE EXISTS THERE. VISIT AGAIN DEMONSTRATES REGIME'S DESIRE TO PRESENT POSITIVE IMAGE TO U.S. PUBLIC.
END SUMMARY.

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2. COLUMNIST ROWLAND EVANS WAS TREATED AS GUEST OF GOI AND PROVIDED WITH CAR AND INTERPRETER/ESCORT. HE MET WITH MINISTER OF INFORMATION TARIQ AZIZ FOR EXTENDED TALKS ON FIRST DAY AND APPOINTMENT TO INTERVIEW RCC VICE CHAIRMAN SADDAM HUSSEIN WAS SET FOR FEB 3. INTERVIEW WITH SADDAM LASTED 2 HOURS. SOME OF MAJOR POINTS MADE BY SADDAM WERE: GROMYKO NOT COMING TO BAGHDAD ON CURRENT TRIP BECAUSE "HE WAS NOT INVITED". IN RESPONSE TO EVANS OBSERVATION THAT ALL ARAB STATES WHICH HAVE GOTTEN DEEPLY INVOLVED WITH USSR HAVE SEEMINGLY LIVED TO REGRET IT, SADDAM REPLIED, "THAT IS SELF-EVIDENT". SADDAM WAS PREOCCUPIED WITH KURDISH WAR AND IRANIAN AND ALLEGED USG COMPLICITY IN IT. WHEN EVANS DEFENDED U.S. POLICY AS ONE OF NON-INTERFERENCE, SADDAM SAID U.S. POLICY TOWARD SHAH WAS LIKE PERSON WHO CONTINUES TO GIVE MONEY TO A LOSING GAMBLER. AT SOME POINT, SUPPLIER OF FUNDS BECOMES AS RESPONSIBLE AS GAMBLER. SADDAM ALSO HAD SOME HARD WORDS ABOUT U.S. "ORGANIC" TIES TO ISRAEL AS OBSTACLE TO ME SETTLEMENT AND TO IMPROVED RELATIONS WITH IRAQ. NOTHING IN CONVERSATIONS WITH SADDAM OR OTHER OFFICIALS LED EVANS TO BELIEVE THERE WOULD BE EARLY IMPROVEMENT IN RELATIONS WITH U.S. THERE WAS, HOWEVER, CLEAR DESIRE FOR EXPANDED COMMERCIAL RELATIONS AND NO INDICATION THAT BUSINESS WOULD BE LIMITED BECAUSE OF POLITICAL DIFFERENCES.

3. SADDAM DENIED EXISTENCE OF ANY SOVIET MILITARY BASES IN IRAQ AND AGREED WITHOUT HESITATION THAT EVANS MAKE VISIT TO UMM QASR. TARIQ AZIZ SET IT UP AND VISIT TOOK PLACE FEB 4. EVANS FLEW OVER AREA IN HELICOPTER, LANDED, AND TOURED IT WITH NAVAL OFFICER. HE SAW NO EVIDENCE OF SOVIET INSTALLATIONS NOR PERSONNEL AND WAS TOLD THAT SOVIET NAVAL VESSEL HAD NOT VISITED UMM QASR FOR SEVERAL MONTHS.

4. ON FEB 5 EVANS RETURNED TO BAGHDAD AND FILED COLUMN TO BEIRUT THROUGH MINISTRY OF INFO TELEX. AS RESULT OF COLUMN, WHICH CONTRASTED DAVID ROCKEFELLER VISIT TO "UNINVITED" GROMYKO, TARIQ AZIZ ASKED TO SEE EVANS AGAIN EVENING OF FEB 5. HE GENTLY CRITICIZED HIM FOR IMPLYING THAT THERE WAS DETERIORATION IN IRAQI-SOVIET RELATIONS. HE SAID DIFFICULT-CONFIDENTIAL

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IES WERE NOTHING MORE THAN ONE EXPECTS IN RELATIONS BETWEEN GREAT POWER AND SMALL COUNTRY. EVANS FELT PROTEST WAS FOR THE RECORD.

5. AT GOI SUGGESTION EVANS ALSO SAW ADNAN AL-HAMDANI, MEMBER OF REGIONAL PARTY LEADERSHIP, SEC GEN OF FOLLOW-UPP COMMITTEE WHICH SETS OIL POLICY, AND GENERALLY CONSIDERED TO BE SADDAM'S RIGHT HAND MAN. HAMDANI CONFIRMED REPORT

IN PIW OF JAN 27 THAT IRAQ HAS REDUCED ITS PRODUCTIONS
EXPECTATIONS FOR 1980 FROM 6 MILLION B/D TO 4 MILLION.
HOWEVER, DEVELOPMENT OF PRODUCTION AND EXPORT CAPACITY
WOULD CONTINUE AND THEREBY GIVE IRAQ MAXIMUM FLEXIBILITY
SHOULD CONDITIONS REQUIRE EXPANDED PRODUCTION.

6. ON ME SETTLEMENT, EVANS LEFT WITH IMPRESSION THAT WHILE
GOI LEADERS UNWILLING TO SAY SO AND PERHAPS CONVINCED THAT
IT IS NOT GOING TO HAPPEN, THEY WOULD WELCOME RESOLUTION OF
ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT.

7. COMMENT: FACT THAT THREE KEY FIGURES OF REGIME (SADDAM,
HAMDANI, AND AZIZ) MADE SPECIAL EFFORT TO IMPRESS EVANS, AS
SADDAM HAD LAST WEEK WITH DAVID ROCKEFELLER, AND ARRANGEMENT
OF VISIT TO UMM QASR ARE ACCURATE INDICATIONS OF IMPORTANCE
GOI PLACES ON GETTING IRAQI POINT OF VIEW ACROSS TO U.S.
OPINION, PARTICULARLY VIS-A-VIS IRAN. LOWRIE

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